DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 371 409 CS 508 588

AUTHOR Daley, Elizabeth A.
TITLE Labor and the Mass Media: A Case Study and Survey of Secondary Literature. Working Paper Series.
INSTITUTION Ohio State Univ., Columbus. Center for Labor Research.
REPORT NO CLR-WP-011
PUB DATE [94]
NOTE 32p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Content Analysis; Higher Education; *Labor; *Mass Media Effects; *Mass Media Role; Media Research; Newspapers; Strikes
IDENTIFIERS Columbus Dispatch; *Media Coverage; Research Suggestions; Teamsters Union

ABSTRACT

Predicated on the assumption that organized labor has long been misrepresented by the mass media, and bolstered by a literature review, a case study analyzed in detail labor news coverage from the "Columbus Dispatch" for the month of April 1994. A total of 37 articles were gathered that related to labor issues--articles on the ongoing nationwide Teamsters' strike were looked for in particular. Results indicated that, in general, coverage of labor issues was sparse, usually too brief and was buried inside the newspaper. The majority of the articles portrayed labor in a negative or biased manner, making no attempt to maintain a neutral tone. For those who study mass media effects and who subscribe to cultivation theory or the agenda-setting function of the media, labor in general, and the Teamsters in particular are getting more than what amounts to a "bad press." Unions are being left out of most Americans' "realities." Further research should consist of a more in-depth analysis, across a longer period of time than one month, and should also encompass television news coverage of labor. Findings suggest that labor unions should try to counteract their stereotypical images in the media, and that reporters need education about labor issues--forging links with university journalism departments might be worthwhile. True collaboration might open new opportunities for both labor and academics. (Contains 35 references and 1 table of data.) (NKA)

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## Center for Labor Research

ED 371 409

# LABOR AND THE MASS MEDIA: A CASE STUDY AND SURVEY OF SECONDARY LITERATURE

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# LABOR AND THE MASS MEDIA: A CASE STUDY AND SURVEY OF SECONDARY LITERATURE

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## INTRODUCTION

Representatives of organized labor in the United States have long argued that the mass media depicts laborers, labor leaders, and labor issues in an unfavorable manner. A pointed example of this misrepresentation is exemplified in the misquote attributed to Samuel Gompers, longtime president of the AF of L. In answer to the query, "What does labor want?" Gompers purportedly replied "More." In fact, Gompers did reply "more," but the quotation has been greatly shortened. What he actually said in 1893 was:

> . . . what does labor want? . . We want more schoolhouses and less jails; more books and less arsenals; more learning and less vice; more constant work and less crime; more leisure and less greed; more justice and less revenge; in fact, more of the opportunities to cultivate our better natures. . .

Certainly the misrepresentation of labor is an extremely important issue, and it is this long standing misrepresentation that served as the initial motivation for this analysis. It is evident that the tension between organized labor and mass media results from more than misrepresentation. I suggest that mass media have also continually failed to provide **adequate** representation of labor and labor related issues.

This essay is divided into three main sections. The first section reviews the existing studies of mass media's treatment of organized labor. The second section and third section are a case study of representation of labor. The sample used for these latter two sections is drawn from one month of newspaper coverage from the *Columbus Dispatch*. Section two of this essay provides a detailed analysis of the one month period of labor news, focusing on the treatment of the Teamsters' strike, which occurred during the time frame in which data was gathered for this project. The month

examined was selected entirely at random. It was strictly coincidental that a nationwide Teamsters' strike occurred as the sample for this study was being collected. However, the Teamsters' predicament greatly bolstered the evidence for this analysis. Section three examines the coverage of more general labor issues during the one month period.

## I. Labor and Mass Media: Existing Research

Scholars have had a fascination with mass media studies for over fifty years. Dissertations, books, and journal articles on the subject of mass media abound. Particularly pervasive is research examining the effects of television violence on children. Other popular topics include analyses involving the depiction of minorities and women by the mass media. In spite of the abundance of mass media studies, it is extremely disappointing to note that only a handful of studies exist in regard to the mass media's treatment of labor.

Although my interests initially focused on studying unions and the mass media from the 1970s on, I was not able to gather an adequate number of sources from this more recent time period. Instead I opted to use all available studies. The most recent data covered in these studies was gathered during the 1989/90 Pittston Coal strike. The oldest data was obtained during 1945 and revolved largely around the much hated Little Steel Formula.

The variety of media examined were expansive. Forms examined included newspapers, film, radio, and television. What follows is a brief summation of previous research on labor in the mass media, presented in a chronological order, according to publication date.

Sussman (1945). This study poses several questions in regard to organized labor. Questions included issues of attention given to labor as

well as the quality (favorable/unfavorable/neutral) of the coverage. The data was drawn entirely from the radio and the method utilized was a content analysis. Overall, Sussman's analysis found that although "important" labor issues were likely to be broadcast, these broadcasts frequently presented labor in an unfavorable light.

DeFleur (1964). This analysis focused on occupational roles as portrayed on television. Though DeFleur's study did not focus directly on organized labor, his findings lend valuable insights to the overall study of organized labor and the mass media. DeFleur uses content analysis of television programs to determine the types of occupations presented and how characteristics of those workers are portrayed. Results of this study indicate that laborers, while comprising 8% of the population, comprise 1.6% of the television "population." These laborers, when depicted at all, were shown as having very little power.

Lieberthal (1976). This study examined the expression of prejudice toward organized labor in selected films and television programs. Lieberthal's analysis determined that workers are presented as vulgar, boorish, ignorant, and unsympathetic characters in film and television.

Johnson (1981). This analysis proposed that television's contribution to the distorted image of the worker is more complex than previously suggested. The sample consisted of the 20 most heavily viewed television programs of the 1979 fall season--excluding news, documentaries, specials, and sporting events. The content of the programs was examined for depiction of the occupation of the characters, as well as for the overall portrayal of work, workers, collective action, and decision making. Johnson concluded that prime time television presents an upper middle class vision

of work and workers that ignores, rather than maligns, workers and their organizations.

Rollings (1983). This study examined the content of 53 television series, 24 television movies, and 24 television specials aired during February of 1980, for representation of workers. Rollings found that unions are nearly always "invisible" on television. On the rare occasion that unions are depicted, they are shown as destructive. He contends that television portrays workers as uneducated and foolish people. He concludes that television both under and misrepresents organized labor, which in turn serves to shape how unions are perceived by television viewers.

Douglas, Pecora, & Gutback (1985). This study sought to examine what labor issues were reported and how those issues were represented in newspaper coverage in order to contribute to a greater understanding of work related issues. This is one of the few studies that did not address whether the labor coverage was favorable or unfavorable. This study found inconsistencies across the three papers examined and found that in coverage of labor, the majority of the issues broached were worker issues, as opposed to societal or institutional issues.

Walsh (1986). This essay examined the treatment of organized labor by the American motion picture industry. Specifically, Walsh examined the films released between 1935 and 1954 that addressed union activity. He determined that during this 19 year period only four films address union activity and of these four, only one presented this union activity from a worker's point of view.

Puette (1992). This study examined 62 television episodes aired between 1974 and 1989 to determine how they depicted organized labor and issues relating to organized labor. Puette examined the content of these

programs to determine whether labor was presented in a positive, negative, or neutral fashion. Overall, Puette found that an overwhelming majority of these programs (76%) portrayed labor in a negative fashion. Only 13% of the programming depicted labor in a positive light, while 10% were neutral in treating labor and labor issues.

Puette (1992). This was a case study examining the media coverage of the 1989/90 Pittston Coal strike by the United Mine Workers of America. The study examined content of newspapers and of television coverage over the nine month strike. During the nine months the *New York Times* ran a total of thirty-nine stories, the *Wall Street Journal* ran only thirteen. The three major networks ran a total of twenty-two minutes and forty seconds of coverage.

The studies examined for this analysis seem to exhibit one of three possible rationales or motivations. The first rationale focuses on the depiction of labor by the mass media and whether that depiction is positive or negative. The second rationale is concerned with labor's presence, or lack thereof, in mass media. These studies were concerned with issues of frequency of appearance of workers, unions, or labor issues in the mass media. The third group of studies were motivated by a combination of the first two rationales articulated here. These studies voiced a concern for both frequency of appearance of union issues **and** whether these union related issues were framed in a positive or negative light. It is discouraging to find that although these studies span nearly fifty years, a variety of media, and were completed by scholars in fields that ranged from history to sociology, the results are surprisingly similar. In summary, all of these studies found labor to be misrepresented, underrepresented, or a combination of both.

## II. What Strike? *Dispatch* Coverage of the Teamsters

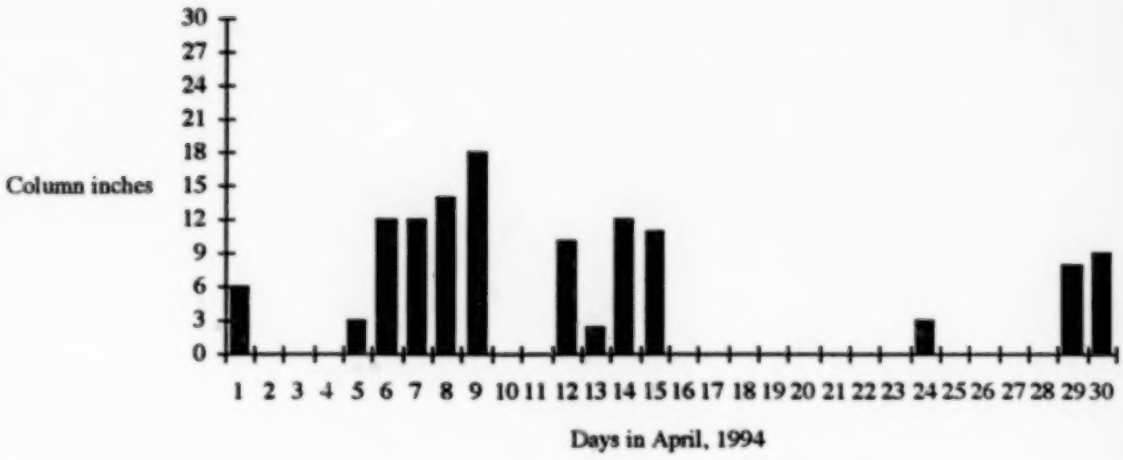
The few studies that exist in regard to labor and the media have typically focused on the depiction of labor in the national media. This case study will emphasize the coverage of labor and labor issues by the local media. In particular, this essay examines a one month period, April 1994, of labor coverage by the *Columbus Dispatch*. To this end articles were gathered that related in any possible manner to unions or workers in general. This very general sort of gathering resulted in a total of 24 articles that related to labor or labor issues. These articles will be discussed in Section III of this study, while Section II will focus on the thirteen additional articles published relating to the nationwide Teamsters' strike.

In discussing the amount of strike coverage offered by the *Dispatch* I will use the form of measurement typically used by newspapers called "column inches." When determining column inches the width is considered a standard, based on the width of a *New York Times* article. Then the article is simply measured along the vertical axis. By adding up the vertical measurements of an article one gets the total "column inches." As a general point of reference, a "Dear Abby" column typically receives 8 column inches each day in the average newspaper. A columnist such as Dave Barry receives approximately 18 column inches.

In the thirty day period sampled for this study the *Columbus Dispatch* offered its readership a total of thirteen articles related to the Teamsters' strike. Over the course of the period of time sampled the *Columbus Dispatch* ran a total of 120.5 column inches. Over the 13 article that averages to a little over nine column inches per article. That length seems reasonable enough, but if you average the 120.5 column inches over the entire thirty day period that amounts to about 4 column inches of coverage per day on the

nationwide strike--about one half of the space Dear Abby receives every day in the *Columbus Dispatch*. Table 1 visually demonstrates this coverage.

Table 1:Dispatch Coverage of the Teamsters' Strike




Of particular concern are the lapses in coverage. In all fairness the strike did not start until April 6, so the lack of coverage from the second to the fourth seems forgivable. However, the gaps in coverage on April 10 and 11, and the enormous gaps from April 16 to April 23 and April 25 through April 28, are of concern. It appears that after the courts limited Teamsters' pickets to just four picketers on each line they were no longer "newsworthy." In short, the Teamsters' were worthy of coverage when alleged incidences of violence occurred--yet completely dropped out of the paper when they carried out peaceful pickets. It is this sort of coverage that contributes to negative perceptions of union members.

Though numbers, averages, and charts tell us something about the *Dispatch*'s coverage of the Teamsters, it also leaves many questions unanswered. Although frequency and thoroughness of the reporting by the

*Dispatch* is clearly suspect, tabulation of column inches does not fully demonstrate the shortcomings of the paper's coverage. A frequency count does not inform us *how* labor is discussed in *Dispatch* articles.

What follows is a narrative analysis of the thirteen articles published in the *Dispatch* regarding the Teamsters' strike. Articles were evaluated for their attitudes toward the Teamsters' position. Specifically articles were coded as being for, against, or neutral towards the strikers. The articles were also examined to determine whose opinions were sought out and quoted in the articles and whether coverage was balanced in regard to these opinions. As a front page article would seem to have potential for greater influence than an article buried on page 4D, the position of the articles in each issue was evaluated as well. What follows is an evaluation of these findings for each of the articles. Conclusions summarizing the entire coverage of the strike follow.

**The *Dispatch* & The Teamsters, April 1994**

Associated Press line of April 1, tucked back in section E, informed readers that "Teamsters reject trucking industry offer; could go on strike next week." This short article (6 column inches) provides indirect quotations by Arthur H. Bunte Jr., the chief negotiator for the industry, as well as a direct quotation from Teamsters President Ron Carey. Bunte is reported as urging union negotiators to place the offer before the membership, as a strike might result in financial harm to both the trucking industry and the workers. Carey voiced concerned for the future of the union, and the issue of low-wage, part-time workers. The text is seemingly balanced, providing opinions from both sides. However, if one looks more carefully at the article it becomes clear that the language used to describe the events is not entirely neutral. Trucking officials are described as "offering" while union officials are making

"demands." This use of language, though common in such situations does little to create a favorable depiction of strikers.

*Columbus Dispatch* readers are left uninformed about Teamster and management negotiations until April 5. On Tuesday the *Dispatch* provides 3 column inches from "staff and wire reports." The headline on this article, in section D, reads "Teamsters to consider options against truckers" and informs readers that union negotiators unanimously rejected the industry's proposal. The union was said to be considering nationwide, or regional strikes. This piece is relatively neutral in its treatment of the Teamsters and of the industry. However, it offers no information as to why the Teamsters would reject the industry's proposal. In short, this article gives no real information regarding the issues of the strike.

The next day, April 6, the *Dispatch* moves the Teamsters up to the third page of the first section of the Wednesday edition. The article, from the *New York Times*, stated "Teamsters strike hits 22 trucking companies." This slightly longer article of 12 column inches, provides readers with some information in regard to issues in the strike. All in all a fairly balanced reporting.

On Thursday, April 7, the Teamsters received their first article written by a *Dispatch* reporter. This article received front-page placement, a large color photograph, and was nearly 12 column inches in length. Unfortunately, the headline immediately creates an impression of futility regarding the strike stating "Trucking strike having little impact: Nonunion companies picking up the business." The color photographs shows the backs of picketing Teamsters, signs in one hand, with their free hands clenched in fists at a passing truck. The caption under the photo reports "Strikers at Consolidated Freight on Alum Creek Drive get some encouragement from a

passing trucker. Other truckers ignored them." This brief article is highly imbalanced and this imbalance functions to both under and misrepresent the Teamsters. This article portrays the Teamsters as unreasonable participants in otherwise rational negotiations, stating that "Teamsters **refuse** to discuss its main issues." The rest of the article provides quotations from four other company officials, portrayed as struggling bravely to get their freight out in spite of the strike. The piece also stresses that shippers are rapidly shifting to nonunion carriers. It is not until the final six lines of the article that the union's position is mentioned. All in all, this front-page account portrays the Teamsters as ineffectual, unreasonable, and largely unimportant.

*Dispatch* reporters again offer their interpretation of the Teamsters' strike on April 8, section B1. This article, fourteen column inches in length, is combined with a 4 x 4 color photo of an injured picketer, other strikers, and Columbus police officers. The headline reads "Judge won't reduce pickets." This headline is rather misleading. If the reader flips to page 2 of the article he or she is informed that Judge Alan C. Travis did grant a temporary restraining order that prohibited the strikers from building fires and shelters at picketing sights. Additionally the article reports of smashed windshields, a Teamsters arrest, and a female nonunion trucker being assaulted.

Though certainly not favorable to the union position, the text of the article provides quotations from both union and management officials. It is interesting to note that although the union's pickets were restricted by the restraining order, that issue is never discussed. Instead the headline reads as if the unions won some sort of victory as the judge had refused to reduce pickets. In fact, that same judge had passed a restraining order on the

drivers. However, due to the placement of the article, only a careful and interested reader would be able to note this distinction.

In an article of 18 column inches, the April 9 editions of *Dispatch* used the headline "Columbus making a name for itself on picketing front." The article is tucked away in section D of the paper. The most detailed article to date reports information in regard to the nationwide and local strike activities. It focuses on the arrests of over thirty Columbus strikers on the previous day. This is the first article that addresses some of the specifics of the Trucking Management proposals and provides a fairly balanced account of the events, including commentary by both picketers and Columbus police. However the restraining orders issued by judges (limiting the number of picketers at each site) is not addressed at any length. Though it is not atypical for a judge to rule against union members, it would seem that this ruling deserves some sort of commentary by the reporters.

A 6 x 6 black and white photograph, courtesy of the Associated Press, bearing the headline "Teamsters' arrests continue" graces page 3A of the April 12 edition of the *Columbus Dispatch.* The photo depicts a Teamster being dragged bodily by two law enforcement individuals. The caption informs the reader of an Indiana driver's arrest and directs the reader to page 4D.

Buried on page 4D of the April 12 edition is 10 column inches on the strike. "Teamsters to back strike with Statehouse rally" is the headline of the very brief piece by *Dispatch* reporters. A quotation from a Yellow-Freight representative portrays Teamsters as being unreasonable in regard to contract negotiations. However, quotations by union attorneys and the Franklin Country Sheriff's office provided a more well-rounded view of the Teamsters. It is unfortunate that this article, being somewhat complimentary

to union members (and the only piece offering information about their upcoming rally) is relegated to the back pages of the paper.

The April 13 edition reverted to two and half column inches of information from Washington headed "Truck firms seek interim accord in strike." The events of Columbus seem to be completely forgotten, and no information is offered regarding the upcoming Statehouse rally.

The April 14 edition boasts a 6.5 by 4.5 inch black and white photo of a Teamster present at the Statehouse rally. The twelve column inches of text estimates the crowds at the Statehouse to have numbered around 400. The article leads with the losses that Trucking companies have faced during the strike, then moves to union concerns. The coverage is somewhat balanced, and for the first time reports that talks "fell apart over the companies' **demands** for increased use of part-time terminal employees and rail shipping." It is a very slight shift, but this is the first time that it appears that management's demands (as opposed to Teamsters' unreasonableness) played a hand in the strike.

On Friday, April 15, *Dispatch* reporters offer a brief article (11 column inches) in section 5B entitled "Truckers talks slated next week; gunfire probed." The text of the article focuses on alleged incidents of violence and shootings against nonunion drivers. Testimony from management representatives and police officers is included in regard to the shootings. The list of five shooting incidents does little to bolster Teamster credibility. No commentary from union officials either confirming or denying the incidents was included.

The Teamsters remain absent from the *Dispatch* for the next eight days, reappearing in a paragraph (3 column inches) on page 10A. The headline of the April 24 article read "Teamsters, truck companies talk with

mediator" and discusses the Washington meetings between the Teamsters, the trucking companies, and a federal mediation. The few lines offer little information in regard to the overall strike, and no information on the Columbus situation.

The *Dispatch* again remains silent on the Teamsters' strike until four days later, April 29. The brief piece (8 column inches) was published on page 5A. The article, "Union, companies find middle ground on pact," reports that both management and the union were pleased with the outcome. It provided commentary from both union and company officials. This brief article offered a fairly balanced or neutral view of the strike.

*Dispatch* again covers the Teamsters on April 30, 1994, the first time since April 15 that a *Dispatch* reporter wrote on the strike situation. This page one article offers a tiny unflattering color photo of Teamster president Ron Carey and reads "Teamsters vote to end 25-day trucking strike." This article (9 column inches) is subtitled "leaders refuse to endorse pact." The article offers no direct quotes from labor representatives, yet offers testimony from four company representatives. The article focuses on the losses involved in the strike--but only the losses experienced by the freight companies. No mention is made of financial difficulties experienced by those who walked the picket lines.

The results do not bode well for the Teamsters, if each of the 13 articles are placed into one of three categories; negative for a negative or biased presentation of the strikers, neutral for articles that present a relatively value-free or at least balanced view of the strike, and positive, for articles that present strikers in a favorable light. Out of the thirteen articles 7 are neutral or balanced in coverage. Five of the articles are negative or biased--in other words they fail to provide the strikers' perspective or they

unfairly depict the strikers. Only one of thirteen articles provided a positive or favorable image of the striking workers.

The *Dispatch's* placement of the little coverage it offered is not particularly hopeful either. Although six of the stories covering the Teamsters' strike did make the front section of the paper, the only article that portrayed the Teamsters in a favorable light was relegated to section C of the paper. The two occasions when the Teamsters' made the front page of the *Dispatch* were articles that portrayed the striking workers' and the union in a negative fashion. Furthermore, nearly all of the articles failed to address the issues of the strike. They focused instead on picket violence.

### III. Labor in the print media: The *Columbus Dispatch*, April 1994

In addition to the thirteen articles on the Teamsters, there were twenty-four articles published during the month of April that related to more general labor issues. Nine of the twenty-four were in regard to the debate over the Workers' Compensation law. Five related to labor support for various candidates in an upcoming election. The remaining ten were on a variety of topics.

Nine articles related to the Worker's Compensation law. Though dealing with an issue of importance to organized labor, unions are not the central concerns of these nine articles. However, the activities of unions and union representatives are noted at times. Five of the articles related to labor support, or lack thereof, for political candidates in an upcoming primary. As with the articles dealing with Worker Compensation reform labor is not a primary focus in these articles. These fourteen articles simply mention labor in passing.

The remaining ten articles were on a variety of topics relating to unions or unionization. It is these articles that contain more substantial information in regard to labor. Therefore the bulk of this part of the analysis will focus on these stories. It is important to note that all of these articles were buried in the back pages of the paper.

Two of the ten articles relate to the activities of the teachers union and their president John Grossman. Teachers were acting in response to the school board decision to add extra days to the school year in order to make up snow days. The teachers preferred to add time to each school day to make up for the snow. An article of April 16 offered numerous quotations by the President of the School Board, Robert Teater, and Superintendent Larry Mixon. The union president is described as "irresponsible" and "unprofessional." While the "disgruntled" teachers are blamed for not utilizing "proper channels." The union is characterized as putting their own interests in front of the interests of the children. However, the issue at hand was not one of whether the time **would** be made up, but **how** that time would be compensated for.

In another article Grossman is characterized as a "negative force" and his approaches are described as "all negative and all adversarial." All in all, this presents a negative or unfavorable view of the Teacher's union and the activities of its leader.

Two of the articles relate to unions in the arts. The Actors' Equity Association is mentioned in passing in an article of Otterbein College's Theater Department. The more interesting of these two articles queries, "Are toe-shoed 'Teamsters' in BalletMet's future?" This article actually provides one of the more favorable depictions of unions included in the entire month of *Dispatch* coverage. Dancers are quoted as saying that they are unionizing

in order to protect their interests. They state, "Being part of a union has many benefits, such as collective bargaining, benefits, working conditions and particularly pensions. We are not going out there for money." It is unusual to see the topic of unions or unionization depicted in a positive fashion.

An article entitled "Unions hit Cincinnati privatization plan" focuses on the "competitive bidding" for union contracts proposal in Cincinnati. The union is briefly quoted as expressing concern for job security. However, those who would toss out the unions get more extensive coverage. They are quoted as standing for "competition" and refusing to bow to "special interest groups supporting themselves on the backs of city taxpayers." The article explains that a similar plan implemented in Indianapolis would save $126 million dollars over the next seven years. The article closes by stating that "displaced city workers" would get the first opportunity at the jobs created by privatization. No mention is made that these jobs were "created" by destroying union jobs. Furthermore, no mention is made as to what would occur in regard to wages, hours, and benefits as a result of this so called "managed competition program."

A strike at an Akron hospital is the focus of a tiny article. It informs readers that although 800 workers, including nurses aides, technicians, food service employees, maintenance persons walked off the job the hospital would continue to "operate normally with replacement workers." No information is offered in regard to the issues of the strike, and although hospital management is quoted, there are no remarks from union representatives included.

"Whitehall unions seek council's help" relates a dispute between union members and city attorneys. The matter focuses on a cap on health-

care expenses violating the union's contract. The reporting, though convoluted, is fairly balanced in its coverage.

The three remaining articles are brief pieces on a variety of topics. One is a caption on a photo from South Wales. The caption explains that a Labor Party member's protest managed to keep the last deep-pit coal mine open in South Wales. Another article mentions briefly the issues of child-labor products in the United States, although it doesn't specifically address union or unionization. The final article of these ten is in regard to a potential strike at OSU by support workers. The article is somewhat balanced offering the testimony of a union spokesperson and explaining the offer OSU presented to union members was about one half of what was offered to non-union members.

Even by a generous estimation, of these ten articles only two could be deemed as portraying labor in a positive manner, five are neutral, and the remaining four are negative or biased in reporting.

In summation, these articles when considered in conjunction with the coverage of the Teamsters, can only serve to harm labor's cause. Beyond the general unfairness and inaccuracy of this sort of coverage, such reporting can have more insidious effects as well. Scholars of mass communication suggest that the mass media in the United States have what is commonly referred to as a "Cultivation Effect."

The main proponent of this theory, George Gerbner, suggests that the mass media serve to mold and shape society. An immense body of research in this area exists and results of cultivation studies suggest that the more time individuals spend consuming media, the more likely they are to "buy into" those media's definitions of reality. For example, Gerbner has demonstrated what is sometimes referred to as the "scary world hypothesis,"

the notion that individuals who spend a great deal of time watching television, believe the world to be a much more violent place than it actually is.

Beyond notions of cultivation theory, the "agenda-setting function" of the media is another commonly accepted term among those who study mass communication. This theory suggests that the mass media tend to limit our view of the world. In other words, while the mass media cannot generally tell us what **to** think, they most certainly can tell us what to think **about.**

I suggest that both Cultivation theory and the agenda setting function of the mass-media are more than obscure theoretical constructions. The *Dispatch's* coverage of the Teamsters' has very serious and detrimental results if one considers the actual implications of these theories. Cultivation theory suggests the detrimental effects the unbalanced and uneven coverage of the strike might have. According to the tenants of Cultivation theory, if *Dispatch* readers only read about Teamsters, or labor unions, when they are accused of violence, those readers might assume that all union members are violent individuals. The overall portrayal of the strike as ineffectual further undermines labor's goals.

Similarly, the agenda-setting function of the media is a factor as well. The lapses in coverage by the *Dispatch* are of real concern. Nothing in the coverage from the 16th to the 23rd would give readers any clues as to whether the strike was still occurring.

In short, labor in general, and the Teamsters in particular, are getting more than what amounts to as "bad press." According to those who study the effects of mass media, unions are being left out of most American's "realities." When unions do appear in the media they are portrayed in a negative fashion.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is at this point in these sorts of papers where the author is obliged to point out limitations in his or her research and to make recommendations for further research. The limitations of this particular study are numerous. One month of labor coverage by the *Columbus Dispatch* is a very small sample. A more in-depth analysis, across a much longer period of time, would certainly be much more informative. The choice of medium for this study, though easily and economically obtained, demonstrates only part of the problem with labor's representation in the media.

Considering the pervasiveness of television, it seems clear that television news coverage of labor merits further attention as well. This researcher watched closely, though unsystematically, the coverage of the strike by Columbus's three local news channels. The coverage of the Teamsters' strike seems to mirror the coverage offered by the *Dispatch*. The Teamsters were the lead story on the evening news if violence occurred on the picket lines, yet they simply fell out of the news some time after April 15. Judging from this researcher's observations, and from the television studies done in the past, television coverage of labor is as bad, or perhaps even worse, than newspaper coverage.

However, in spite of the ever present call for "more research" of the problem, it seems clear that real need is for **solutions**. Admittedly, the studies of labor, as outlined in section one of this essay are few, yet they all demonstrate similar results. Labor is underrepresented and misrepresented by all forms of mass media. In short, what Sussman determined in regard to radio coverage in 1945 is disappointingly similar to the results of this study performed nearly fifty years later.

Scholars have come up with a variety of "lists" that mark the bias or misrepresentations that occur in media's view of labor. Of all the lists I find Puette's list to be the most useful. William Puette (1992) concludes his work with the delineation of eight "lenses" through which these distort the mass media's depiction of labor. Addressing and altering these eight "lenses" seems to be a key in coming up with solutions to labor's media woes. Puette's eight lenses are as follows:

1. Labor unions protect and encourage unproductive, usually fat, lazy, and insubordinate workers.

2. America is unable to compete internationally in open markets because big, powerful unions have forced the nation's employers to pay exorbitant union wages to unproductive workers.

3. Although some very poor and abused workers (particularly women and immigrants) may need to form unions to protect themselves, big international unions usually fail to represent the interests of such workers.

4. Union leaders, because they do not come from the educated /cultured (privileged) classes, are more likely to be corrupted by the power they achieve than are business or political leaders.

5. Unions should be volunteer societies organized and led by unpaid unprofessional staffs of selfless workers; union dues should not be used to pay anyone's salary.

6. There was a time, long ago, when unions were necessary (when some of our older friends and relatives were in the movement), but now things are different. Employers are enlightened and would not generally try to abuse their workers. In the few cases where they might, new federal laws (Fair Labor Standards Act, and the various civil rights acts, and the Occupational Safety and Health Act) can provide reasonable protection against employer abuse.

7. Unions institutionalize conflict. Unions came into being to solve a specific labor relations problem. They solved the problem and instead of going away, they remain to dredge up conflict where there would otherwise be perfect harmony.

8. All unions are the same. All unions are, therefore, accountable for the corruption or excess of any one union or union leader and share the guilt or shame. (Puette, 1992, 154-155.)

I argue that the lenses that Puette identifies are precisely the stereotypes that labor needs to counter. Countering prejudice of any sort is a difficult task, and there are no easy solutions to the problem. However, I would like to make a few suggestions in regard to possible steps towards reducing labor union's mass media woes. Admittedly these are just suggestions--and tentative ones at that--but here are two general ideas or directions that might be pursued.

**1. Building Bridges with the Mass Media.**

The mass media need monitoring, as this study suggests. The media are supposed to avoid portraying stereotypical images. Educating reporters to labor issues would be a start. Perhaps forging links with Journalism Departments at Universities would be a worthwhile. In a similar vein, alliances need to be struck with local news outlets. Though it would be quite understandable for unions to want to avoid such contact--especially in light of the manner in which the media have often treated unions. However, it seems that desperate times call for desperate measures. Local unions need to have officials readily available to make prepared statements that television and newspaper reporters can use in their coverage. It appears Teamster officials were consulted for some of the *Dispatch* stories, however they rarely made the television news. By striking alliances with the local media, unions might have a better chance at having "human interest" stories broadcast.

What might some of these "human interest" stories look like? An example of a potential solution was broadcast on April 12 on Channel 4 WCMH during the 11 p.m. news. This brief story shows thirty-nine year old Teamster Bruce Blackburn with three of his five children. Blackburn states that he is striking because he refuses to "sell out the future workers of America." The reporter states that "the strike is changing things for the Blackburns--the way they handle money and the way they live." As we view footage of Blackburns' three adorable little children tumbling about the backyard, Blackburn states "this is a full time country--not a part-time country." As tears brim in his eyes he explains the reasons why he is striking and risking imprisonment. He states that he must walk the picket lines, not only for his kids, but for "your kids too." Perhaps a bit melodramatic, but this is precisely the sort of press the Teamsters need. The Blackburns are a typical young family, and in this segment there is no mention of the rock-throwing thug-types that pervaded nearly all the media accounts of the strikers. Clearly this more sympathetic coverage helps counter some of the "lenses" that the Teamsters and unions in general are viewed through.

**2. Working more closely with Educators.**

Education is always a stock answer to these sorts of problems--but in this situation it seems clear that a tremendous amount of misinformation exists in regard to unions. Education of reporters on labor issues is a key, but those educational efforts need to go further. Labor extension and education programs, such as the one that funded this research, fulfill part of those goals, but more needs to be done.

As a member of the Department of Communication at The Ohio State University I have noted that Business leaders often take advantage of the

research and teaching our department does. These leaders utilize the work of our department in the areas of public speaking, organizational and interpersonal communication skills, mass media studies, and the study of persuasion theories to make their corporations run more smoothly and profitably. I would suggest that unions need to take advantage of these resources as well. I know that many academics are guilty of studying labor unions and workers without ever talking to actual workers. However, many of my colleagues are committed to stepping out of the "Ivory Tower" and applying their work to worthwhile causes. True collaboration might open new opportunities for both Labor and academics.

In conclusion, I find myself drawn again to the words of labor great Samuel Gompers. Labor, in regard to mass media coverage, today needs "more." Labor involvement in conflicts needs more coverage by the mass media; likewise labor's calm periods need more coverage. Labor needs more representation on television, more representation in the newspapers, and more representation in popular films. Yes, Gompers was right, labor does want more--more coverage by the mass media--and less unfounded criticism.

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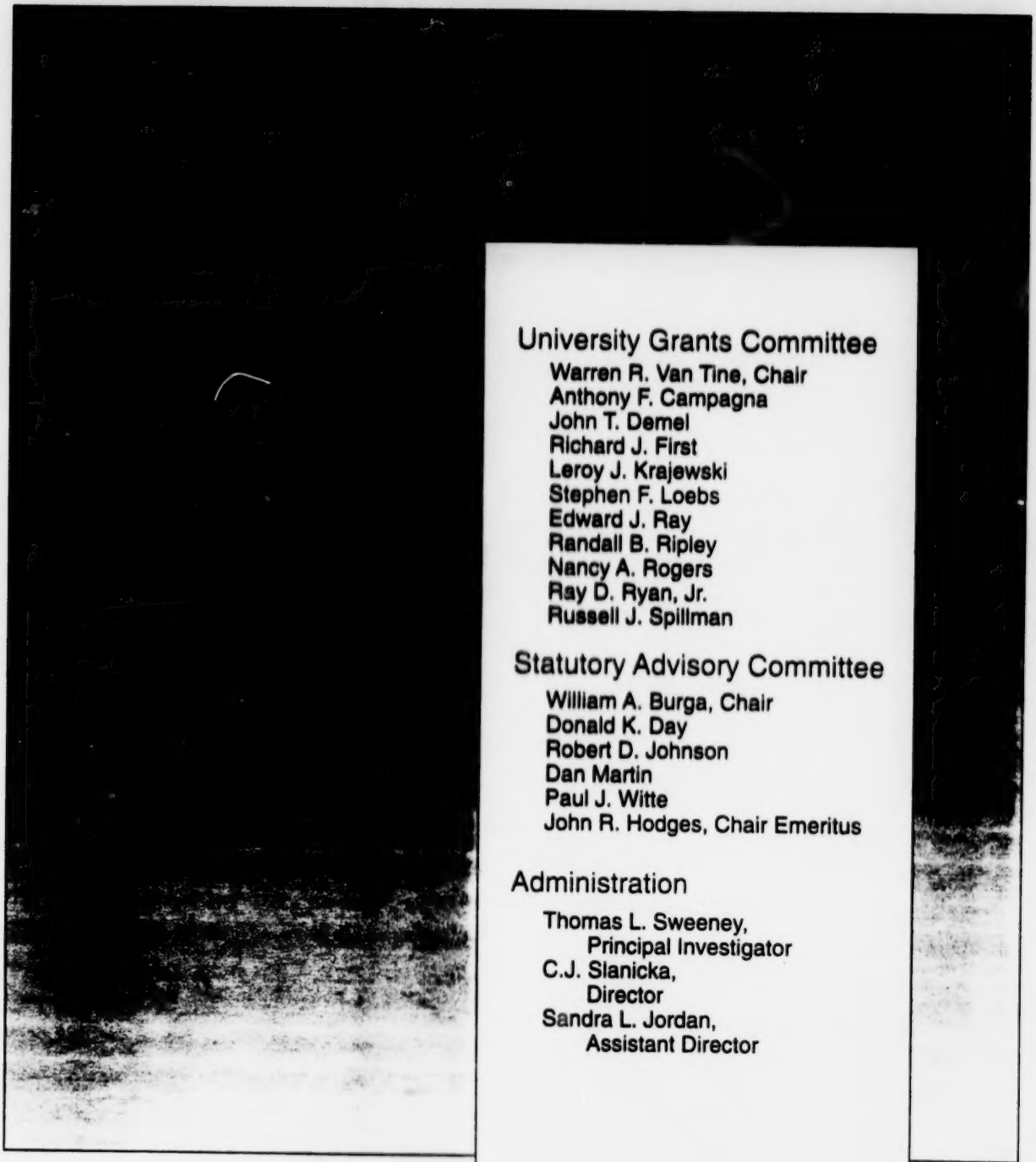


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